



Illustrations  
Arcanum

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**S**ince the mid 1940's, Frank Frazetta has emerged as a significant survivor in the art of illustration by carving out a unique niche among a limited but worldwide audience of fans and discerning collectors.

**W**ithout putting too fine a point on it, one could argue that Frazetta, as an artist, holds the same stature in fantasy illustration that the writers Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler were able to achieve with their ground-breaking stories in pulp magazines of the 1930's.

**L**argely ignored or denigrated in their own time because the venue they chose to work in was thought unworthy by the mainstream arbiters of taste, their sheer talent—over time—overcame what the critics told us all we were supposed to like.

**T**his book is a collection of new drawings done by Frazetta using a primitive medium—pencil—to portray the primitive subjects he is best known for.

**I**n a rare recent interview, Frazetta said, "The pencil is a lost art form... the artist's true vision... I can smudge, I can erase in lines, I can make the pencils talk."

**M**ore than a century ago, art in America was a realm of different values. Someone such as a Winslow Homer, for example, would serve an apprenticeship learning the craft of drawing, work through a period of journeymanship creating line illustrations for mass publications such as newspapers, then—with luck and talent—gain a patronage for advanced work in oils. It was a time when artists paid dues in a predictable fashion.

**I**t wasn't until shortly after the end of the Second World War that those who follow such things, art historians and other observers of the social graces, began to notice important changes. The war's devastation would shift the weighty center of fine art from Paris to New York and simultaneously trigger a resurgence in abstract expressionism.

**F**or better or worse, some would argue definitely worse, one of the main tenets

of abstract expressionism was the whole-scale rejection of realistic rendering as, in the words of critic Clement Greenberg, somehow lacking the "purity" of art for art's sake. The work of a Jackson Pollock, for example, is not a picture of a thing, it is the thing.

**A**ccording to Tom Wolfe, a keen observer of social phenomena, "The idea was that half the power of a realistic painting comes not from the artist but from the sentiments the viewer hauls along to it, like so much mental baggage."

**W**olfe, one who is far from reluctant to point out when the Emperor is disrobed, wrote in 1975 that the advent of the abstracts caused art to be judged less on content and more on the spurious concept of "plausible theory." Such theories were definitely not supposed to be grasped by the "bourgeois" masses.

**F**razetta has never been willing to abandon the notion that there is a validity to paying dues the old-fashioned way. Develop skills, style and a following, and success should happen. The quality of what you create should be self-evident. A plausible theory is, in the final analysis, irrelevant. Cynics might call that naive; others would say it is a matter of integrity.

**T**here is also irony, *vis-a-vis* Frazetta's work, in that the best of it is rendered in a realistic style but bears only a loose connection to the world as we know it. Its disconnection with the known world can sever the viewer from an anchor point in time itself. In the Frazetta universe, images can be seen as either renderings of an earth-bound world in the primeval long ago, or as a tableau of a scene in the distant future in a galaxy far far away.

**A**ccording to Frazetta, "I think the art should speak for itself."

**W**hat speaks is the idea that the crucial difference between a gifted artist, and those who would aspire to be such, is the ability to not only be an accurate recorder of what *is*, but also have the unique talent to project what *might* be.

## Poetry in Pencil

Throughout his career, from the delightful funny-animal drawings of the 1940's and the comicbook stories and covers of the 1950's, to his now-famous Conan and Tarzan paintings in the 1960's and 1970's, Frank Frazetta has proven himself to be what a legion of fans would call a genius in the field of imaginative art.

During those years, his special gift has astonished with his mastery of oil painting, amazed with his ink illustrations, and charmed with whimsical watercolors. Widely imitated, his style has also had a profound influence on today's rising stars in the craft of illustration.

These more elaborate works of Frazetta are now well known but until now only a small circle of collectors has been exposed to his talent for sketching in pencil.

Such drawings have an important place in art history. Great masters such as daVinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael were virtuosos of the pencil/charcoal medium, and in the early twentieth century Fortunino Matania produced many distinguished works in pencil and wash.

Today the pencil has been devalued and largely overlooked as a medium in itself. Artists use it primarily as a preliminary foundation drawing for a painting or illustration. It is used as a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Frazetta has long been fond of the potentialities contained in the humble pencil. This volume unleashes a treasure trove of new material. In these drawings Frazetta explores the power of the pencil and raises the medium to a new level of excellence. In the hands of Frazetta light and shade are not used merely to represent objects but to display a wide range of emotional effects.

This first volume of pencil drawings is devoted to the various monsters, creatures, demons, and nymphs that live in Frazetta's imagination. These drawings display love, care, and inspiration, there is an ecstatic, rapturous, enthusiastic dimension to all these

compositions—the creative dreamings of a master artist who extends our perceptions, widens our imaginations. For Frazetta, art is always an exciting, daring and adventurous enterprise. Notice the use of space in these compositions with their spare and minimal backgrounds. It is a technique for using open space to isolate the subject and enhance intensity in the same way that a composer highlights important tones in a background of silence.

There is a wonderful simplicity at work here, Frazetta forces the viewer to concentrate on what is essential and consciously eliminates anything that would diminish his artistic intention. It presents a single idea as forcefully as possible. Frazetta's figures do not merely fill the space at hand but present attitudes or gestures proportioned to the subject-matter.

Frazetta employs a wide variety of effects in these drawings. For example, the leopard and snake composition (Plate #9) is pure energy. There is a riot of emotion and savagery in each slashing touch of the pencil. His lines resonate with movement, rhythm, life. The Frazetta line is a miracle of expressive power.

On a completely different note, the Egyptian Queen drawing (Plate #15) is quietly powerful. The Queen on her throne exudes regal grace, bearing, authority, her expression is simultaneously haunting, bewitching, and seductive. The cat adds overtones of loyalty, dominance and everpresent danger.

Another provocative composition is the nude and reptile (Plate #63). The nude is, quite simply, exquisite and delicious. She is lavishly and lovingly textured. The shadings are gracefully executed and softly nuanced. Frazetta's touch is light and deft. This is the power of the pencil raised to a new level. It is a work of carefree sensuality, explosive vitality, and glowing beauty. The subject matter is engaging, enigmatic and provides much food for thought.

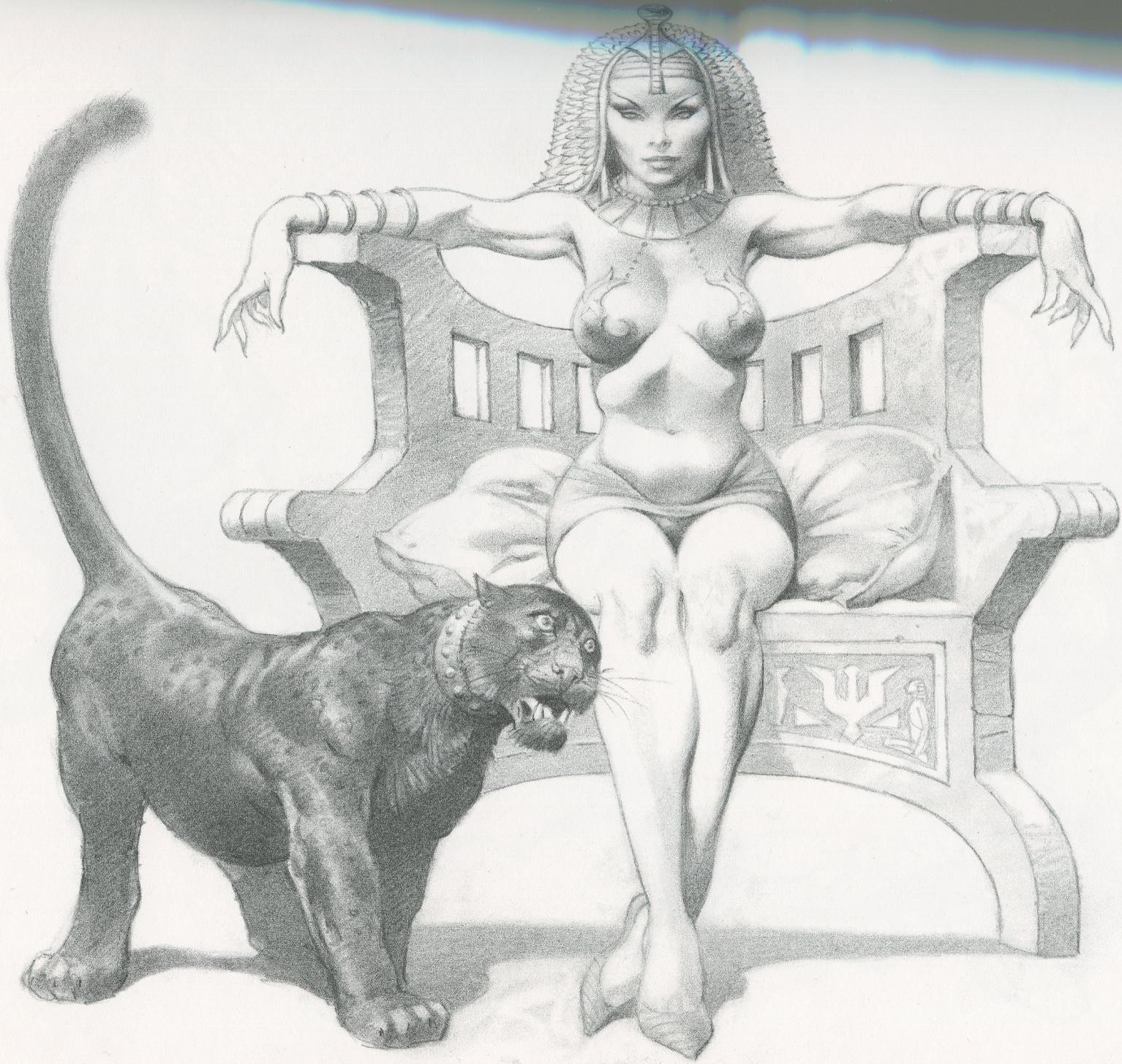
In this book Frazetta conjures up scenes that fascinate us, astonish us, move us; he presents us with the magic and mystery of life. Real art is a form of magic, it must enchant us and hold us in its spell. Frazetta is a magician.



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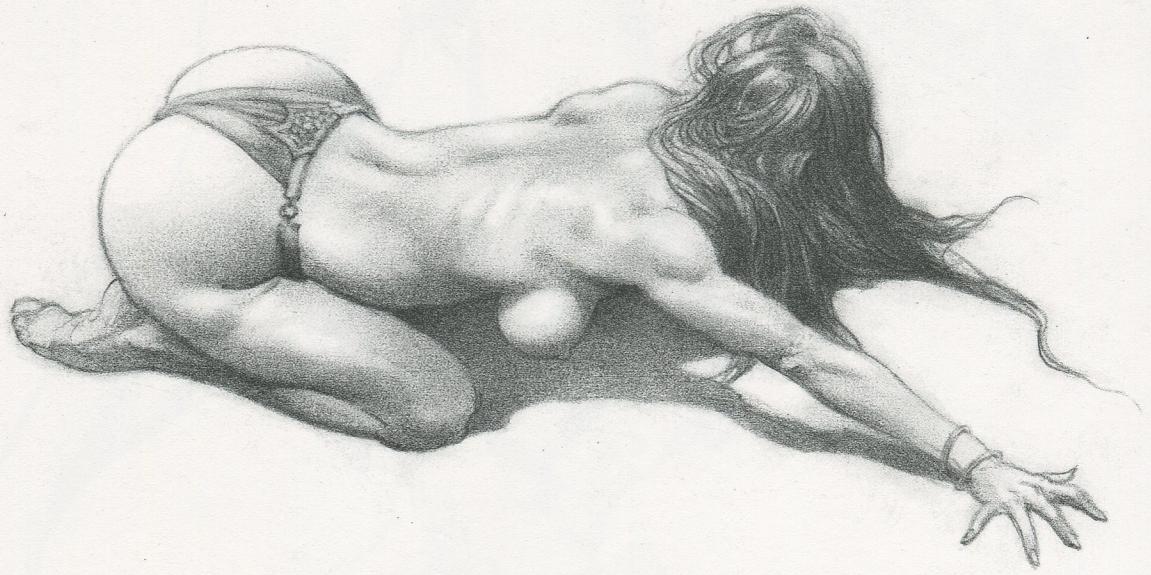












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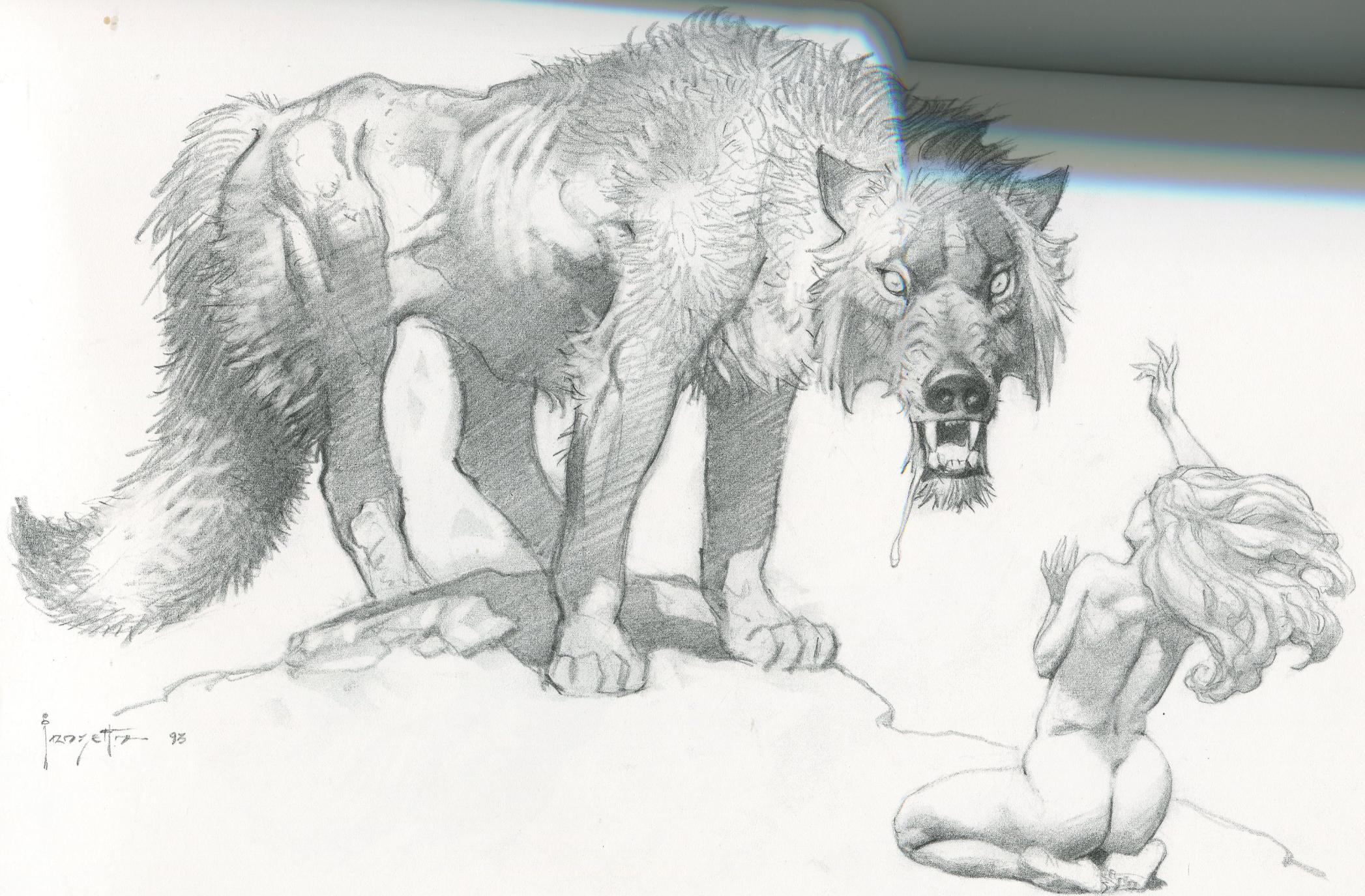




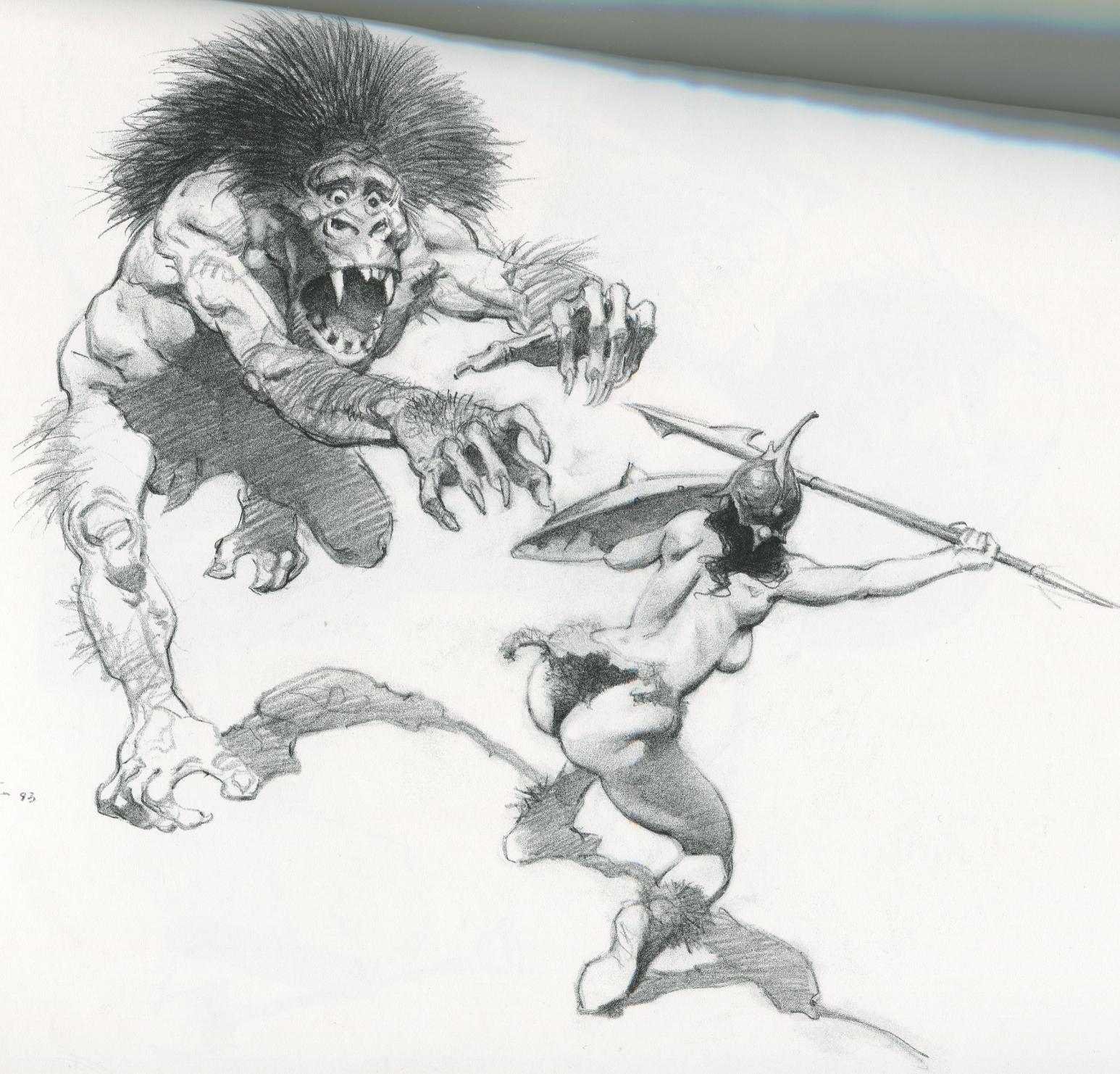




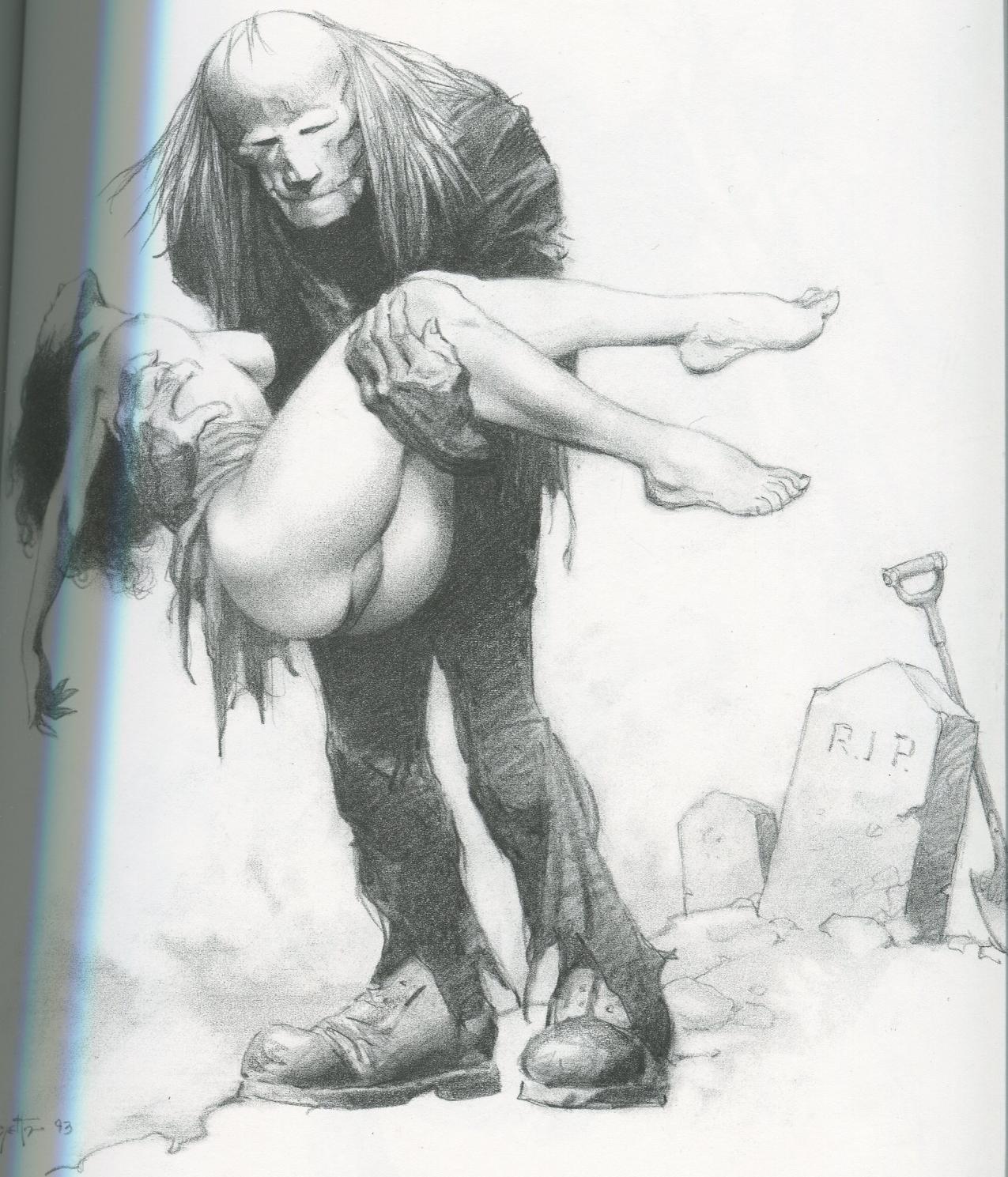








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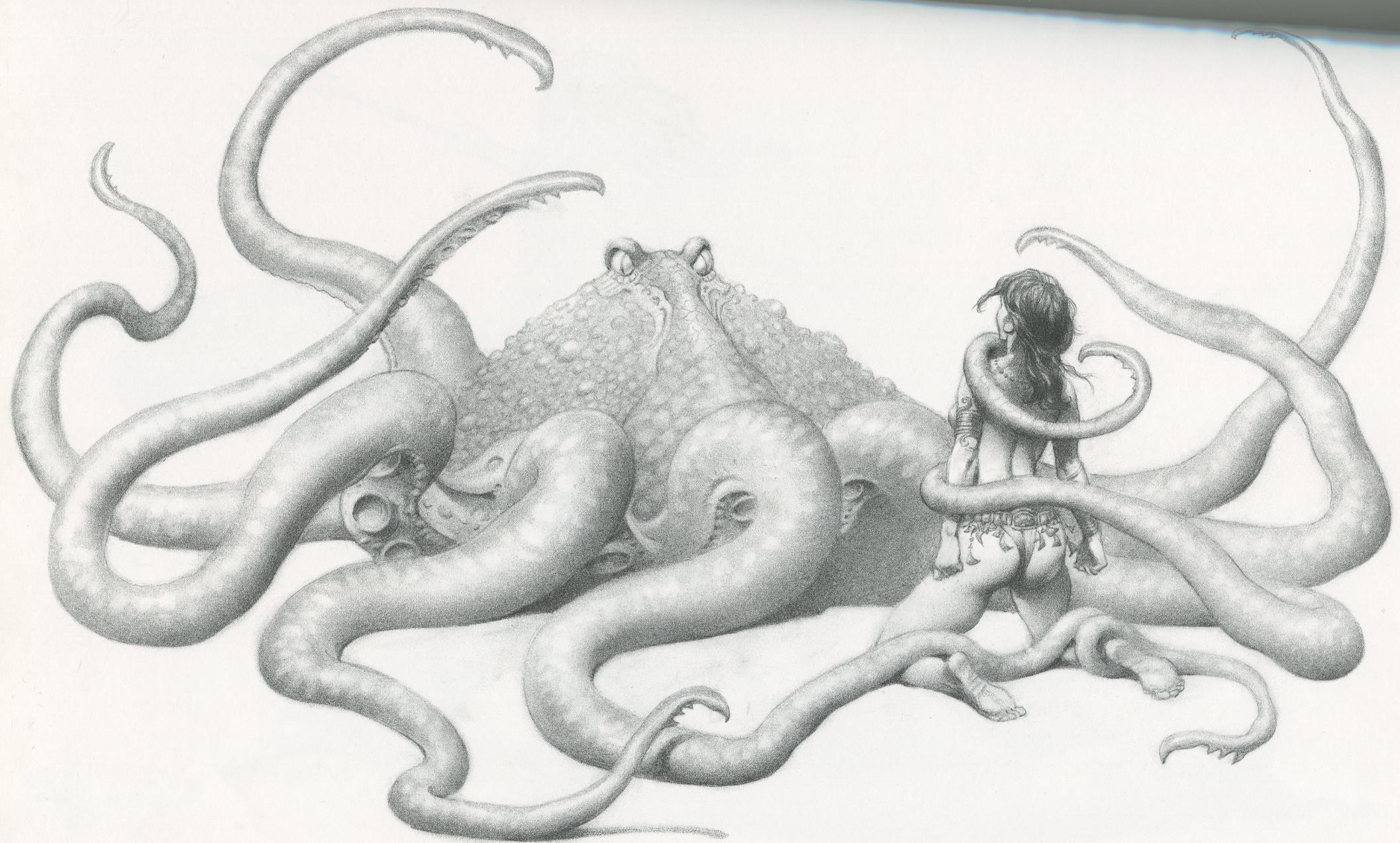








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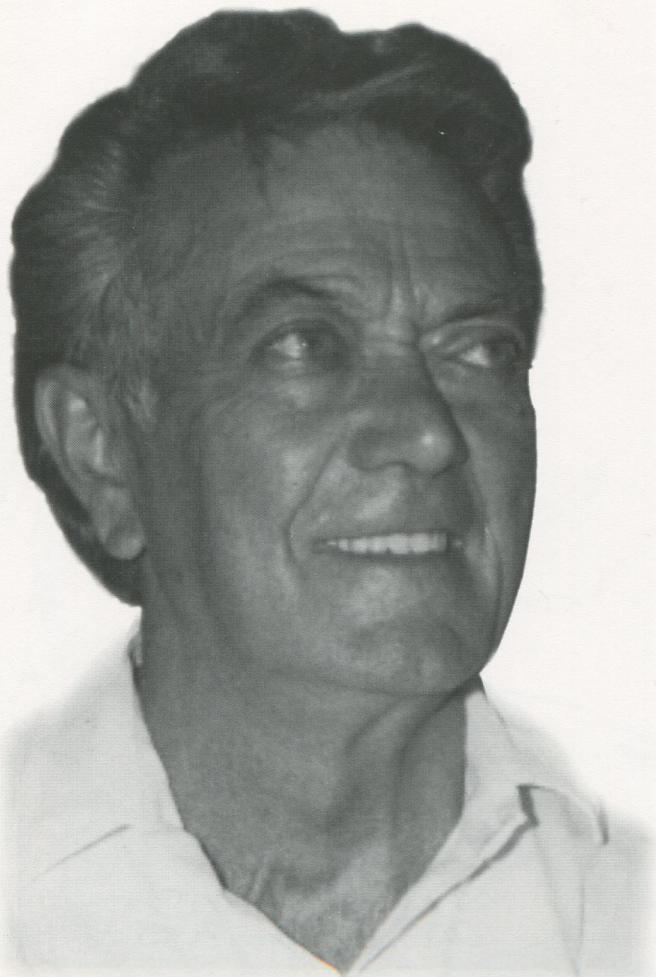
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Frazetta 93







In the rough-and-tumble world of commercial illustration the roadside is littered with the careers of those fallen victim to the whims of the marketplace, the self-imposed demands of having to produce at an ever-higher level of creativity, and the burden —ironically— of one's own success. Frank Frazetta has spent more than five decades in such a world and emerged with a still-loyal following of fans, a market among discerning collectors, and a unique style which has aged remarkably well.

Frazetta was born in Brooklyn on February 9, 1928 into a just-folks sort of family with no special interest in the arts. Baseball, it is safe to say, was a more common dinner conversation than The Baroque.

At the age of eight, he was in the third grade at a public school. All children learn to draw, but there are perhaps few teachers who would recognize in a student—blindingly early—a talent which transcends their

*"I would rather be ashes than dust.*

*I would rather be a comet,  
every particle of me in magnificent  
fiery glow, than a stable and sleepy  
planet. I will not waste my days  
trying to prolong them.  
I will use my time."*

Jack London

own. Confronted with that emerging talent, and knowing that they lacked the resources to develop it fully, Frazetta's teachers urged his parents to enroll him in the Brooklyn Academy of Fine Arts.

Brooklyn was different then, and at that time the Academy had 30-some students—all adults—whose ages ranged to around 80. The Academy was run by a man named Michael Falanga who had a background in the classic fine arts. Falanga became a mentor to Frazetta and by the time Frazetta had reached his mid teens Falanga was making plans to send his young prodigy off for further study in Italy.

Falanga's death in 1944 ended those plans and led to both the closing of the Academy, and, for Frazetta, a major turning point. Of the options available, his choice was to start looking for work in commercial art.

The bad news was that, at 16, Frazetta was awfully young for any art director to trust with a major assignment. On the other hand, most of the world was at war, and Frazetta wasn't yet old enough to be drafted.

Frazetta went to work as an assistant to science fiction and comic artist John Giunta doing odds-and-ends on comic books. By the end of a year Frazetta had talked Giunta into publishing "Snowman" under a Tally-ho Comics masthead. It was signed with Frazetta's nickname "Fritz."

Within the next five years Frazetta would find himself involved simultaneously with work from three separate comics publishers and turning down other offers from such people as Walt Disney. His direction led instead into memorable covers for "Buck Rogers" and the publication of "Thun'da" in 1952.

Two years later, Frazetta would reach a turning point which shifted his career in yet a further dimension. It came in the form of an offer from Al Capp, the creator of a widely-syndicated daily newspaper strip called "Li'l Abner."

One day along about this same time, Frazetta was spending a day at Coney Island when he met a young woman who, perhaps more than anyone, would help guide his career in the future. As the story goes, Ellie Frazetta met Frank at Nathan's hot dog stand while she was showing an out-of-town uncle the sights of New York. They were married after a four-year courtship and have been together ever since.

Meanwhile, as first part-timer and later assistant to the volatile Capp, Frazetta would attain some measure of financial security but at the cost of several more years of harsh deadlines and the mind-wrenching push to provide something fresh every day on tiny and coarse line art panels. Arguably, those artists who survive the process, that dues paying, become the best of the best.

Still, at some point enough becomes enough, and on the eve of the 60's

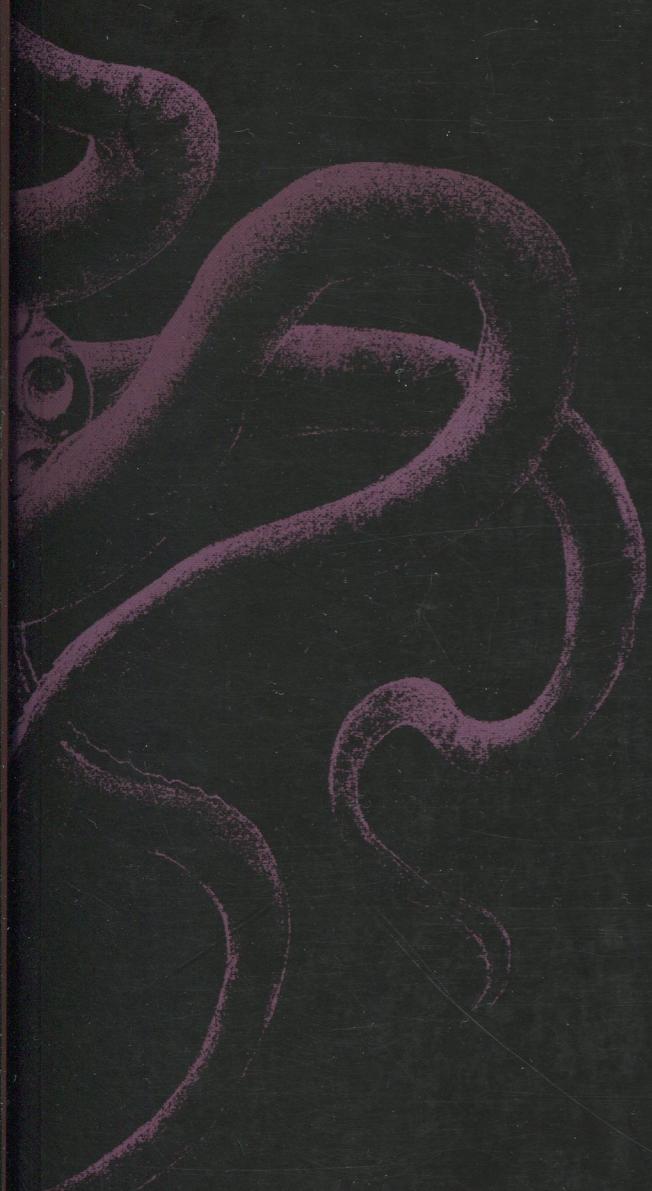
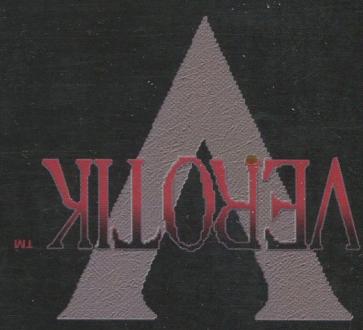
Frazetta left Capp to move in a different direction. Around that time, Hugh Hefner's magazine Playboy had fallen into the mainstream as a legitimate venue for serious art and literature (some men really do read the copy), and Frazetta, seeking to stave off lean times, joined a group of veteran *Mad Magazine* staffers in helping put together Hefner's comic parody "Li'l Annie Fanny." For the uninitiated, "Li'l Annie" was a ditzy-blonde cross between Terry Southern's literary "Candy" and an imaginary older version of "Little Orphan Annie" with a touch of Voltaire's "Candide" thrown in.

The relaxed pace gave the 36-year-old Frazetta a chance to fall back and look at options. During the early 60's the two-decade-old market in mass paperback books had started reaching its prime and, for an artist, the chance to do book covers meant the opportunity to have even more time to let the creative spirit wander.

During this time, Frazetta began to produce the paperback covers which would earn him international fame. His style would bring to life characters for the Edgar Rice Burroughs titles, Tarzan, Carson of Venus and the Pellucidar books, and for the series of Robert E. Howard's "Conan" novels, among others.

In 1971, looking for an escape from the now-mean streets of Brooklyn, the Frazetta's moved to a small town in Pennsylvania which has been the home for some years of a museum of the artist's work. Over time, the market for Frazetta's work has changed from one of mass circulation to that of commissions done for a select circle of collectors. As this book is being prepared for the press, the Frazetta's are planning to move once again to Florida where Frank will be able to devote more time to his golf game. The museum is also slated for a southern relocation.

At this time, Frazetta is involved in oversight of the pending release of his "Death Dealer" character in comic book form with artwork generated by the noted young British artist Simon Bisley.



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